

Remarks on Earth Day in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia April 22, 1998

Thank you very much. Thank you for the welcome. I want to especially welcome all the young children and not-so-young children and all of you who feel childlike, even though you're not anymore, to this wonderful American celebration of Earth Day.

I thank the Vice President for his steadfast, constant, and brilliant leadership to preserve our environment for future generations. I thank Congressman Bob Wise, who has been a good friend and an adviser and represents you so well. I want to thank our National Park superintendent, Bob Stanton. You know, I was sitting with Bob, and I said, "You know something, you've got the best job in the whole Federal Government." And he said, "I know, and they're foolish enough to pay me to do it every day." [Laughter]

Mayor Stowell, thank you. Pam Underhill, thank you for your work at the Appalachian Trail Park; thank you for a lifetime of dedication to America's National Park System. And I'd like to ask all of you to give a round of applause to all the National Park employees who are here. They do a wonderful, wonderful job. [Applause]

Finally, let me thank Sandi Marra and all the other volunteers who worked with the Vice President and me today to make sure we didn't mess up anything so badly. I walked away saying, "Now, I wonder if they're going to have to go along behind us and undo all the stuff we just did and then do it right?" [Laughter] I don't think so. I think we crossed the threshold of minimum competence as volunteers today.

But let me say to you, Sandi, and to all the other volunteers that are here and those who will hear about what happens here today, the American people have utterly no idea how dependent not only the Appalachian Trail but the entire park system has been on citizen volunteers. And we who know need to do more to get out the word, but I hope you and all your fellow volunteers will continue to work. We need you; we honor you; and we're very grateful. Thank you very much.

We came here today in part to highlight the work of the volunteers. Last year they gave over 8 million hours, the equivalent of \$100 million,

in hard but loving labor to enhancing America's great outdoors.

You know, the Appalachian Trail was conceived of 100 years ago by a teenager who was hiking among the sugar maples and spruce trees in New Hampshire, in the White Mountains. Benton MacKaye imagined connecting the country all the way from New England to Georgia with a hiking trail and, in the process, reconnecting Americans to the wonders of nature. As MacKaye said, "Life for 2 weeks on a mountaintop would give renewed perspective to the other 50 weeks down below." Do you mind if I stay here another 13 days? [Laughter] That's pretty good.

And so began the Appalachian Trail, the brainchild of a teenager; the product of generations of cooperation; one of our most precious national gems; the longest natural thoroughfare in the world passing through four of seven forested habitats of North America; a haven for rare plants and animals. And thanks to many of you here today, this Appalachian Trail surely has surpassed even Benton MacKaye's wildest dreams.

Today, on our 28th annual Earth Day, we come here to the stunning confluence of the Shenandoah and the Potomac Rivers to celebrate the foresight of early conservationists and to commit ourselves to carry forth their abiding sense of responsibility to future generations in the new millennium.

I'd like to take just a couple of minutes to tell you what the agenda the Vice President and I have adopted for the coming year is. First, we want to preserve even more of our natural wonders. In the historic balanced budget agreement, we have the means to save the ancient redwoods of the Headwaters Forest in California, to protect Yellowstone from the ravages of mining. And I am proposing to add 100 new sites to our Nation's endowment of sacred places. We should begin by bringing the last remaining sections of the Appalachian Trail under public control, thereby making every inch a part of our children's birthright.

Among other priorities of providing a critical winter range for elk and bison and restoring salmon runs in Washington's Elwha River, what

I want to say to you today is that the money has been authorized and appropriated for all 100 of these projects but not yet released. As a courtesy and a practice of long standing, administrations notify Congress of the intended project target. And sometimes there is an objection, sometimes a legitimate one, to one or two of them. We have put together a great list of 100; none of the money for any of the projects have been released because of actual or potential disputes on other issues.

So if you can do anything, if any of you live in congressional districts—aside from Congressman Wise, he's not the problem—I hope you'll do it, because we need to get about the work and do it now. The money is there, the economy is in good shape, the budget is going to be balanced. We have made this commitment to our future, and I'd like to see us get it done. So I'd like to ask you to encourage your Congress to support the release of this fund.

Second, as part of our celebration of the millennium in which we will both honor our past and imagine our future, we have to expand our efforts to preserve our places richest in cultural and historic values, sites that echo with America's most important stories. That's what we see here in Harpers Ferry—the other part of Harpers Ferry: the story of John Brown, the story of pre-Civil War America. And we have just unveiled an initiative to preserve the homes, the churches, the other sanctuaries all along the route of the Underground Railroad, the route to freedom for Harriet Tubman and thousands of other fleeing slaves. It also includes part of the Appalachian Trail.

Third, as the Vice President said, we want to improve our ability to encourage and support better stewardship on our private lands, through voluntary partnerships to help private landowners preserve their own land. Of the more than 100 million acres we have protected during the last 5 years, more than three-quarters are privately owned. It's a real tribute to the American people that they want to manage their property properly, and I believe it's the right thing for our Government to do, to get out there and create the incentives and the partnership and the support for them to do so.

For example, right here in the Appalachian region, acid drainage from abandoned coal mines have polluted streams severely, endangering plant and animal life. But now we're working with mining companies to create natural

buffers to stop pollution from flowing in the streams. Citizens already are reporting that fish stocks are recovering, for the first time since the early part of this century.

Successful local models like this are at the core of the clean water initiative I announced in February. We must do more of this. Wherever people are willing to help us with private property to restore biodiversity, we need to support it. And I thank you for your support.

Fourth, we want to change and broaden the focus of how we manage our national forests, putting greater emphasis on recreation, wildlife, and water quality—forest values too long ignored. We're reforming logging practices to ensure sustainable supplies of timber and jobs.

Our national forests are more than mere paper plantations. They are the source of the vast majority of our fresh water and as places where far more families experience the outdoors than anywhere else in America. So I urge Congress today on Earth Day: Let's make our national forests a common ground, not a political battleground.

Fifth, we must commit to healing the wear and tear in our magnificent but often quite over-extended national parks. Many parks, refuges, and monuments are in dire need of repair, ironically, because the American people love them so much. Countless Americans set off for their vacations every year knowing they can have the best and most economical vacation in the world at a national park. Often it may be the only one they can afford and still might be the best one money can buy. We have to continue to honor this pact with the American people. And therefore, I have proposed an increase of nearly \$1 billion over the next 5 years to carry on the work of repairing our National Park System.

Finally, as the Vice President told us in his remarkable book, "Earth In The Balance," years ago, we have to broaden our notion of stewardship of the environment to embrace our entire planet. The greatest environmental challenge we face today is that of global climate change. If we are growing more interdependent economically, if we are growing more interdependent socially, surely our interdependence environmentally is apparent to every thinking person. The world's leading climate scientists have warned that if we do not reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, the Earth will warm, the seas will rise, severe weather events will intensify and increase in number.

Fortunately, we know how to avert these dangers. We know we can make great progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through innovative technological, market-related solutions all around the world. We have made an unprecedented commitment here of more than \$6 billion for research and development and tax incentives to promote new green technologies that will dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emission. I hope you will all support that. And I hope you will tell your elected representatives it is a great investment in our children's future.

You know, the Vice President mentioned Teddy Roosevelt, who is a particular favorite of mine among our past Presidents. Ever since Teddy Roosevelt started talking about conserving our natural resources, for 100 years now, every time someone has said it, someone else says, "If you do that, it will ruin the economy." And we now have 100 years of experience. They have uniformly been wrong every time they have said it for 100 years.

And since 1970 and Earth Day and the Clean Air Act, we have heard it with repeated intensity. It has always been wrong. Every time we have taken a sensible, reasoned, but strong step to protect the environment, we have actually increased the diversity of our economy, the breadth and width of it, and increased jobs and strengthened the long-term economic prospects of our country.

That is a lesson the whole world has to embrace now. We can only sustain economic growth if we can improve the environment, if we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, if we can build a balanced future together.

So I hope that all of you, as you leave here on this Earth Day, will honor the great gifts God has given us, will honor our National Park employees and others who preserve our treasured resources with their careers, will honor these volunteers, but most of all, will promise yourselves to be the best possible citizen stewards of our resources.

That is the ethic that inspired Americans to preserve Harpers Ferry, the landscape that President Jefferson said was worth a voyage across the Atlantic. That is the ethic that will enable us to honor our responsibilities as Americans well into the 21st century.

Thank you, and happy Earth Day.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:12 p.m. at the Point in Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. In his remarks, he referred to Robert G. Stanton, Director, National Park Service; Mayor Walton (Kip) Stowell of Harpers Ferry; Pamela Underhill, Park Manager, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and volunteer Sandi Marra, member, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club. The National Volunteer Week proclamation of April 21 and the National Park Week proclamation of April 22 are listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on the House of Representatives Release of Tobacco Industry Documents

April 22, 1998

The House Commerce Committee today released thousands of tobacco industry documents. I commend Chairman Bliley, Congressman Waxman, and the members of the Committee for helping to bring these documents to light.

The release of these documents underscores the urgency of enacting comprehensive, bipartisan tobacco legislation this year, which can stop 3 million children from smoking over the next 5 years and save 1 million lives. I am committed to working with legislative leaders on both sides of the aisle, in both the House and the Senate, to enact a comprehensive bill to stop young

Americans from smoking before they start—a bill that raises the price of cigarettes, puts into place tough restrictions on advertising and access, imposes penalties on the industry if it continues to sell cigarettes to children, and ensures that the FDA has authority to regulate tobacco products. Our Nation's children are counting on us to put politics aside and work together in a bipartisan manner to get this job done.